

- Measure Approves Safety Improvements for Whaley Lake Dam and Key Flood Control Projects in Orange County -

Washington, DC – Last night, by a vote of 361 to 54, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to override the President's veto of H.R. 1495, the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA). WRDA contains authorization that U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19) requested for key safety improvements to Whaley Lake Dam in the Town of Pawling, New York, and also for important flood control projects in Orange County.

The assistance for Whaley Lake Dam that Hall secured has long been sought by the community to enhance dam safety at Whaley Lake Dam.

"A dam failure at Whaley Lake would be a tragedy in this community, causing deaths, environmental damage and economic catastrophe," said Hall. "Whaley Lake Dam desperately needs attention now, before a major disaster happens."

The Water Resources Development Act of 2007 is the first water resources legislation that Congress has passed since 2000. It authorizes a variety of flood control and water management projects that will require future funding to be approved by Congress.

"Our country's infrastructure has been neglected for far too long with disastrous results," said Hall. "Communities in the Hudson Valley and around the country are suffering from outdated infrastructure that risks people's lives, property, and businesses. The Water Resources Development Act is long overdue legislation that authorizes critical investments to help prevent flooding."

Whaley Lake Dam has a history of serious structural and repair flaws. The dam is over 150 years old and has fallen into serious disrepair. For years remedies were sought for the dam but major improvements were never completed. The dam holds back more than 1.2 billion gallons of water, and the lake is crucial to the quality of life for the neighborhood of homes that surround it.

Some of the problems at Whaley Lake dam include a release valve that is no longer operational and cannot operate properly in the event of a flood. The spillway is not up to current standards and the crank is in the center of the dam which makes it virtually inaccessible. Boils have also emerged on the dam which suggests there is seeping in the dam.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation finally investigated and determined that either repairs would have to be made to the dam or the DEC would have to breach it. Such a breach would devastate the entire Whaley Lake Community.

Despite efforts of local leaders, the dam has yet to be repaired and has structural deficiencies that have to be addressed or it will be taken down. The dam has a downstream hazard potential of "high" meaning if a malfunction were to occur, there would most likely be loss of human life as well as economic and environmental damage.

In addition to the Whaley Lake fixes, Hall also secured authorization for several key flood control projects in Orange County. These provisions include:

- Watershed management at the Ramapo River watershed
- Emergency streambank protection at the Kowawese Unique Area and Hudson River in New Windsor, New York
- Removal of snags and clearing and straightening of channels for flood control for the Kowawese Unique Area and Hudson River in New Windsor
- Removal of silt and aquatic growth at Greenwood Lake, New York and New Jersey
- Watershed management at Greenwood Lake watershed, New York and New Jersey

“Severe flooding has hit the Hudson Valley repeatedly in the last decade, causing major economic damage to people’s homes, businesses, and farms,” said Hall. “Orange County desperately needs better flood control management to prevent this from happening.”

Last night's vote was the first successful override by the House of Representatives of a veto by President Bush. On August 1st, the House passed the WRDA conference report by a vote of 381 to 40, followed by the Senate on September 27th by a vote of 81 to 12. The President vetoed the legislation on November 2nd. The Senate is expected to vote to override the President's veto of WRDA later this week.

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